

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 8, 2007

Hon. Dr. Robert M. Gates, Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
Office of the Secretary of Defense
1300 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1300

Dear Secretary Gates:

We are deeply concerned by recent news reports about a Department of Defense proposal to remove combat status from soldiers serving in Kosovo.

We believe it is inappropriate to dismiss the dangers that our servicemen and women serving in K-FOR face every day. Soldiers in Kosovo operate in a region with an unstable government and outbreaks of violent lawlessness. Ethnic tensions are on the rise in Kosovo and landmines and other unexploded ordnance present a serious threat to American soldiers on the ground.

In fact, the U.S. State Department pays its Foreign Service officers in Kosovo "danger pay" for serving in a location where conditions "threaten physical harm or imminent danger to the health or well-being of an employee." It is unfortunate that the Department of Defense does not recognize the same danger posed to its personnel.

Additionally, removing the combat zone classification from K-FOR soldiers would mean significant financial hardship to soldiers serving there. Those men and women would no longer receive "imminent danger pay" or tax advantages for their overseas service. It is extremely unfair to ask these soldiers—who have left their families behind as they answer their country's call—to endure a significant new financial burden as well.

Many of the soldiers who are currently serving or will soon be called up to serve in Kosovo have made several overseas deployments. Removing their combat status will do more than hurt them and their families financially; it will also be a serious blow to their morale.

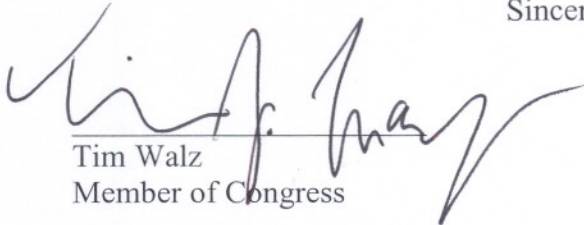
We would appreciate your prompt response to a number of questions we have about this proposed redesignation:

- Were military officials in the European theater given the opportunity to comment on this proposal and if so, what were their opinions about the decision to reclassify the Kosovo mission as one that is not combat-related?
- Is the Department of Defense considering any other redesignations of combat status for other overseas deployments?

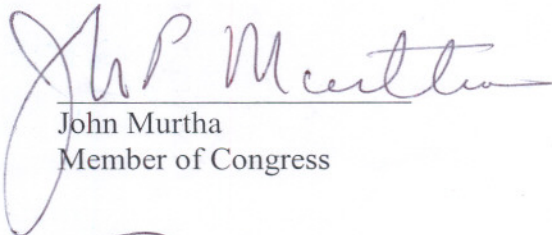
- What qualitative measures (acts of violence against K-FOR forces, numbers of K-FOR soldiers wounded while deployed, etc.) did the Department of Defense consider when it made this proposal?

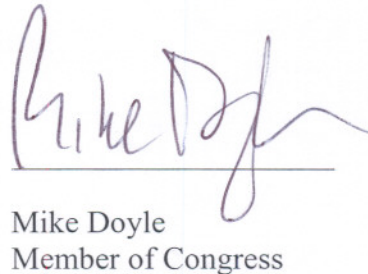
We strongly oppose this proposal and hope that you will take steps to ensure that the mission in Kosovo continues to be certified as a combat mission.

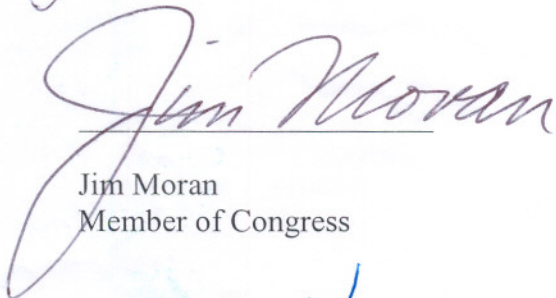
Sincerely,

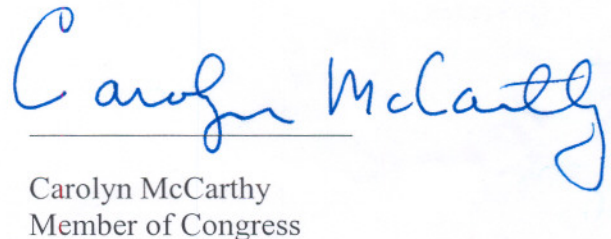

Tim Walz
Member of Congress

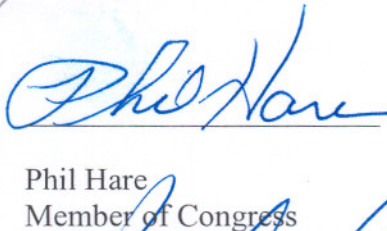

Steve Kagen
Member of Congress

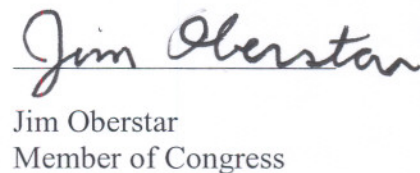

John Murtha
Member of Congress



Mike Doyle
Member of Congress


Jim Moran
Member of Congress

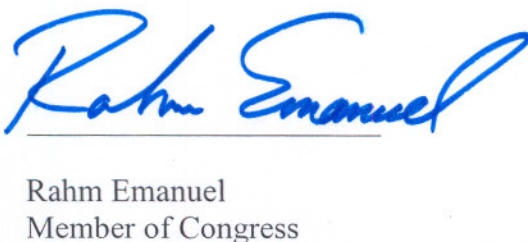

Carolyn McCarthy
Member of Congress

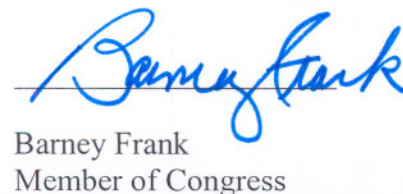

Phil Hare
Member of Congress

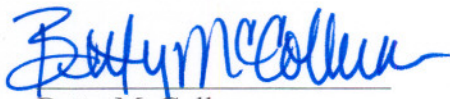

Jim Oberstar
Member of Congress


Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

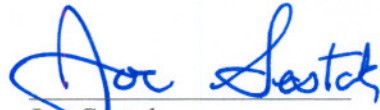

Collin Peterson
Member of Congress


Rahm Emanuel
Member of Congress

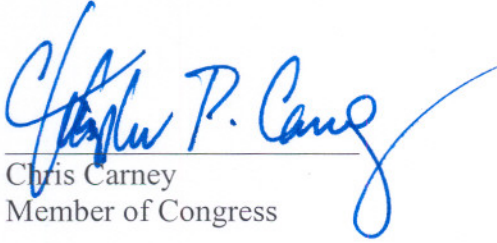

Barney Frank
Member of Congress



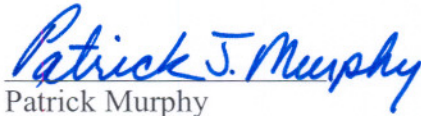
Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



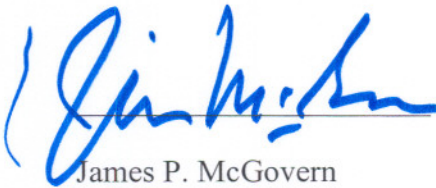
Joe Sestak
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Chris Carney
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Patrick Murphy
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James P. McGovern
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Nancy Boyda
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